

# Key Stage 3 National Strategy

## Gender: raising boys' achievement

### key messages

Key Stage 3 managers in schools, teachers, consultants in all strands

The aim of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy is to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning for all pupils. Tackling underperformance is a key to raising standards. This leaflet focuses on gender as part of the drive to raise standards and widen participation. Research is clear that:

*there are no simple explanations for the gender gap in performance nor any simple solutions (Arnot et al.).*

## What is the evidence?

### Examination data

2002 Key Stage 3 test results at level 5+

Subject	Boys (%)	Girls(%)
English	58	75
Maths	67	68
Science	66	67

2002 GCSE results at 5 A\*–C

	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Total at 5 A*–C	46.0	56.6

2002 Key Stage 2 results at level 4+

Aspect	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Reading at 4+	77	83
Writing at 4+	52	68
Total at 4+	70	79

The above is a very broad picture, but suggests that there is a gap in English and that that gap may rest more in writing than reading. Lower attainment in writing will have a knock on effect across the curriculum.

However, the results can vary.

- Boys do not universally underachieve: there may be greater difference across a cohort of boys than between boys and girls in a given cohort. Boys are not a problem in themselves.
- Boys tend to be more represented at the very top and bottom of achievement; girls may bunch more towards the mean.
- Many girls underachieve.
- There can be more than 20% difference in performance between boys in one school and boys in another, similar school.
- GCSE results do not take account of subject choices.

- Adele Atkinson and Deborah Wilson suggest that the gender gap may widen during Key Stage 4. 1997 Key Stage 3 results were compared with the same cohort's GCSE results: added value was greater for girls than boys.
- There is a complex interrelationship between social class, ethnicity and gender in underachievement, for example middle class boys will out-perform working class girls.

## **Socio-cultural information**

### *Exclusions: DfES statistics*

- The ratio of boys excluded to girls is 4:1 at secondary level.
- Years 8–10 account for over two thirds of permanent exclusions.
- Exclusions peak in Year 10 with more than 25% of all secondary exclusions.

### *Classroom behaviour*

- Boys attract 60% of teacher attention in mixed classes, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic origin, gender of teacher, age of pupil or curriculum area.
- When praise is given it is usually for academic performance rather than behaviour, so if boys are not performing academically, then they receive less praise.
- 40% of the disapproval of girls, as opposed to 26% of disapproval for boys, was for lack of knowledge or skill (Spaulding).

### *Wider aspects*

- 1996 evidence from Ofsted inspections showed that about one secondary school in five was weak in meeting the particular needs of one or the other sex (Ofsted).
- Boys are less inclined than girls to learn from indifferent teaching (Ofsted).
- Women continue to be under-represented in senior management, especially in areas of finance, the law, and business. This may be because boys more than girls tend to choose subjects such as maths, economics and technology, which may offer wider career choices later.
- Boys may benefit from well-planned, coherent approaches to literacy across the curriculum (Ofsted).
- Underachieving pupils take little part in whole-class teaching episodes and underachieving boys withdraw from positive class interactions very early in their school careers. (Debra Myhill)
- The gender gap is an international phenomenon (OECD PISA study).

## Find out where you are

### Analyse your data, so you know:

- the difference in attainment between boys and girls. Use ethnicity data to look at differences for ethnic groupings;
- where there is variable attainment across subjects; subject residuals;
- which groups are underperforming within a cohort of boys and a cohort of girls;
- what the value added data shows you: you may have a smaller than average gap, but you may add value to one group more than another.
- whether one group of boys/girls is improving more than another;
- which pupils failed to achieve their potential. Translate percentages into numbers of pupils and numbers of pupils into individuals;
- in what way these individuals underachieved: look at their actual test papers and samples of their work;
- which teachers are more successful than others at adding value to pupil attainment;
- the gender choices at option times, and how pupils treat those who may opt for non-traditional subjects;
- where your exclusions peak and who is excluded for what.

### Classroom observations to gather information on:

- the structure of lessons, and the teaching and learning styles;
- the greetings, seating, starts, conclusions and dismissals of lessons;
- teacher mobility: how teachers move round the pupils, which pupils they work with and how often;
- formal and informal language used between teachers and pupils, and among pupils;
- the pace and challenge in lessons;
- the kinds of questions asked and who answers;
- whether the language of pedagogy is used;
- whether colleagues are right in their perceptions of off-task activity and general behaviour;
- the number of teacher interactions with boys/girls and the nature of those interactions;
- whether teachers have high expectations of all their pupils;
- the approximate ratio of praise to criticism and what pupils are praised/criticised for;
- classroom organisation: where do boys and girls sit;
- whether the teacher organises groupings or whether the pupils choose who they work with;
- the context within which topics are taught: do physics-based contexts appeal to girls' interests; does narrative writing permit boys' interests?

- the experience of teaching and learning of a representative sample of underachieving boys and girls across the curriculum.

## Address the identified issues

- Prepare a report of the baseline situation which identifies the issues.
- Plan action arising from the report.
- Be clear about what the outcomes should be, how these will be measured, how resources will be allocated and how the plans will be evaluated so that further action can be decided upon.

However, while you are conducting your own research, there are activities which you can instigate quickly to begin to address the issues.

The DfES is currently undertaking a three-year research project on boys' underachievement with the Cambridge Faculty of Education. Preliminary findings are available at:  
[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement).

We have used the same areas of activity as a guide for organising work in schools. They are:

<b>Pedagogic</b>	focusing on teaching and learning strategies.
<b>Individual</b>	target setting, mentoring, self-monitoring.
<b>Organisational</b>	basis for setting/banding; groupings within and across classes.
<b>Socio-cultural</b>	school ethos: high expectations for all; erradicating the 'it's not cool to learn' culture; a focus on negotiation rather than confrontation; the hidden curriculum; the value placed on various kinds of attainment and success.

## Quick start activities for classroom teachers

### Pedagogy

- Teach to objectives which are shared with and understood by the pupils.
- Structure lessons to maximise learning.
- Have high expectations for all and insist they are met.

### Individual

- Use assessment for learning to communicate what a pupil needs to do next: keep it SMART.
- Involve pupils in their work; discuss achievement and the next move: use their views to decide on your next move.

## Organisational

- Structure the lesson into whole-class, group and individual learning.
- Start and end the lesson on time and purposefully.
- Take a close look at the groups pupils work in: begin to organise these yourself if you do not already do this.

## Socio-cultural

- Expect pupils to achieve: no excuses.
- Ensure teachers see themselves as learners too.
- Set clear, consistent parameters for behaviour.

Altering the socio-cultural aspect of school life will bring about longer-term improvement. It may take more than three years of support and attention to change the culture.

*Significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can take 2 or 3 years; bringing about institutional reforms can take 5 or 10 years (Michael Fullan).*

Longer term activities to change the socio-cultural aspects of the school are suggested below. There will, however, also be changes in pedagogy, approaches to individuals, and organisation. In each case, senior managers, heads of department/year and classroom teachers are involved. All the research shows that the commitment of the headteacher and senior managers is key to both the appropriateness of strategies chosen and the level of implementation. However, this commitment needs to be actively supported by the staff. Above all, attainment rises in an ordered environment with clear boundaries and high expectations of all pupils.

## Senior manager activities

- Appoint a senior manager who leads on raising attainment for underperforming groups and who takes responsibility for strategic planning, monitoring and evaluating the progress against the outcomes.
- Review equal opportunities, behaviour, and teaching and learning policies: make changes if necessary so that underachievement is addressed and stereotypical responses prevented as far as possible. Do the policies address anti-swot culture and seek to value all kinds of attainment: academic, sporting and social?
- Check who adheres to the policies and how senior managers support and monitor them. This applies to the whole school community.
- Set up peer observations and, if necessary, coaching to ensure teachers change their practice if needed.
- Formally monitor classroom practice against the agreed actions.
- Accept no excuses for underachievement, especially *that's just the way boys are; girls are not so good at physics*, etc.

- Challenge stereotypical choices for GCSE: suggest alternatives. However, ensure that pupils are supported in their choices and teachers/pupils do not criticise those who make them.
- Consider insisting on a 50% reduction in marking so pupils have to do some self-assessment, based on clear criteria for the task and levels.
- Ensure monitoring of pupils' work and behaviour is tight.
- Ensure literacy across the curriculum is a planned, coherent aspect of school work.
- Survey parents and pupils about the school's curriculum, teaching, work setting and marking. Act on the results if necessary.
- Involve the community in what you are trying to do: consider a cyber café in school, taster courses for parents in the various curriculum areas. Challenge parents to take part in non-stereotypical courses.
- Invite parents to apply for teaching assistant posts.
- Instigate a system of systematic, long-term mentoring for underachieving pupils.
- Ensure staff and pupils treat each other with respect.
- Ensure departments begin to address the issue of underachievement in their schemes of work.
- Decide on a whole-school 'no hands up' policy, but ensure questioning is differentiated and targeted.
- Review any whole-school policies and rationale for setting, banding, grouping: consider appropriate changes for next year.
- Instigate ways of giving pupils responsibility, e.g. a prefects' system, school librarians or ICT trouble shooters, but ensure a gender balance across the various areas. Train pupils to do the job.

Note: Many schools have had considerable success in closing the gap by the introduction of expressive arts in Key Stage 3 so all pupils follow dance, music and drama courses.

## **Heads of department/year activities**

- Use data to identify underachieving groups, especially groups within groups, e.g. high/low achieving boys.
- Set up a tracking system for all pupils, but especially those at risk.
- Review rationale for banding, setting and grouping within years and classes. Next time look to ensuring a gender/ethnic balance across groups.
- Monitor practice for the effects of teaching on learning and progression.
- Conduct a work sample and then change, if necessary, e.g. range of texts used, range of writing done and comments made for improvement.
- Plan appropriate literacy teaching into your schemes of work.
- Review resources to ensure a broad range of media and text-types.

- Survey pupils about how they feel about their work, the marking and support. Take the findings seriously and act on them.
- Ensure pupils have level descriptors and criteria for marking each piece of assessed work so they can monitor their own performance.
- Instigate an investigation into speaking and listening in the department. Are pupils developed in their speaking and listening ability? Does the talk support their learning through investigating, justifying, hypothesising, etc.
- Ensure parents are informed about what the department is teaching and how they might support it.

## **Classroom teacher activities**

- Ensure pupils see you as a learner too.
- Manage the greetings, seatings, starts, conclusions and dismissals of lessons.
- Time limit activities.
- Plan for a variety of teaching and learning styles.
- Think about the language you use, both formal and informal.
- Plan guided work so you spend focused time with all pupils according to need.
- Teach pupils the strategies they need to complete the task by modelling what pupils need to do.
- Vary responses to reading, not just comprehension questions.
- Ensure pupils learn to work independently.
- Give pupils responsibility for their learning, encourage problem solving.
- Break writing tasks down into manageable chunks: ensure feedback throughout.
- Get the balance right between content, style and presentation when reviewing pupils' work.
- Encourage the use of audiotape and video as alternatives to written responses.
- Consider the layout of the classroom: does it support a range of activities or restrict them?
- Look at where pupils sit in the classroom and ensure you control the seating plan.
- Ensure you organise the groups for learning according to your outcomes. Keep groupings fluid so that sub-groups are avoided.
- Give pupils time for oral rehearsal of response before they have to commit to it.
- Challenge thinking, encourage pupils to justify any response; play devils' advocate.
- Be clear about what is being assessed, share it with pupils.

- Use a wide range of resources, including multi-media and moving image.
- Use ICT for creating text from start to finish so pupils read and manipulate text electronically.

## Other sources of information and support

- Further guidance for schools on gender and achievement is available at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/genderandachievement). This site provides an on-line resource of best practice, analysis and practical advice. Case studies of successful practice are being added throughout 2003–04.
- [www-rba.educ.cam.ac.uk](http://www-rba.educ.cam.ac.uk)  
The Homerton College 'Raising Boys' Achievement' project website.
- *The National Healthy School Standards to Raise Boys' Achievement*, published by the DfES and the Health Development Agency (ISBN 1 84279 128 1) also available at [www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk). This booklet looks at broader issues such as involving pupils in the life of the school, emotional health and, again, develops the ideas in this leaflet.
- English department training 2003–04 *Improving boys' writing* leaflet (DfES 0318/2003)
- *Yes he can: schools where boys write well* (Ref HMI 505) available from Ofsted Publication Centre, Tel 07002 637833; [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)
- *Boys' achievement in secondary schools* (Ref HMI 15659) available as above.
- *Improving Boys' Literacy*, Basic Skills Agency, Nov 1997 (ISBN 1 85990 070 4) [www.basic-skills.co.uk](http://www.basic-skills.co.uk)
- Arnot, M and Gubb, J, *Adding Value to Boys' and Girls' Education: A Gender and Achievement project in West Sussex*, West Sussex County Council, 2001
- Atkinson, A and Wilson, D, *The widening gender gap in English Schools*, Market and Public Organisations (8), January 2003: [www.bris.ac.uk/cmpo/mpoissue8.pdf](http://www.bris.ac.uk/cmpo/mpoissue8.pdf)
- Fullan, M, *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, Routledge Falmer, 2001 (ISBN 0 415 26020 5)
- Francis, B and Skelton, C, *Investigating Gender*, OUP, 2001 (ISBN 0 336 20787 1). This book gives some theoretical background to gender issues, a useful companion for the Rowan et al. text.
- Myhill, D, *Bad boys and good girls?* British Educational Research Journal, Volume 28, No 3. Patterns of interaction and response in whole-class teaching.
- Philips, A, *The trouble with boys: parenting the men of the future*, Harper Collins, 1993 (ISBN 0 04 440870 6)
- Rowan, L, Knobel, M, Bigum, C, Lankshear, C, *Boys, Literacies and Schooling*, OUP, 2002 (ISBN 0 335 20756 1). This takes a close look at the mind sets involved in gender issues and suggest ways of transforming the way boys and girls are taught.